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Christ Purifying his Temple; or, the Principle of the Puritans.

A

SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

MOUNT VERNON CHURCH OF CHRIST

(Rev. Dr. Kirk's),

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS,

Sabbath, Dec. 24, 1865, "Forefathers' Day,"

BY

Rev. J. BLANCHARD,

PRESIDENT WHEATON COLLEGE, WHEATON, ILLINOIS.

"Take these things hence."—Jno. 2; 16.

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SERMON.

And Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and found in the temple those that sold oxen, and sheep, and doves, and the changers of money, sitting: and, when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple; and the sheep and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; and said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence, make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. — John ii. 13–16.

It would seem that our Lord twice purified his temple of things which had not his warrant to be there, — once at the beginning of his ministry (John ii. 14), and once at its close (Matt. xxi. 12); and both instances were followed by wonderful manifestations of his power in healing the body, of his wisdom in teaching, and his grace in saving the people.

And if it were not that his whole person and work are so wonderful, this scene would surely seem most wonderful: — the meek and lowly Jesus, in the garb, perhaps, of a rustic artisan, and followed by a few disciples, plain and humble like himself, in the heart of that haughty metropolis (and no pride is like the pride of priests), in the temple of its national worship, assailing, denouncing, and with a scourge of small cords, driving out, like a herd of cowering slaves, along with their own cattle, those whom religion had made confident, and money had made bold!

Jesus Christ closed the Jewish dispensation, and founded the Christian church; and as the Father sent him into the world, "even so" has he sent us. (John xvii. 18.) What, therefore, he did in his temple, we are to do in his church.

It is a serious mistake to suppose the New Testament to be more lax than the Old; to imagine that Christ cares less for the purity of his churches than he did for that of his Temple. True, the Old Testament is formal, and the New, spiritual, — that is, in the New, the form is not the essence of the commandment; neither, indeed, was it in the old, for, even then, God would "have mercy, and not sacrifice." (Matt. ix. 13.) But the difference between them is this: In the Old Testament the spirit is reached through the form; while in the New, the form is required by the spirit. But both are precise, for in the Old Testament church positively nothing was left to human invention; rites, altars, implements, even to the tongs and snuffers, all, literally and absolutely, everything was made and ordered "as the Lord commanded Moses." "For see, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount." (Heb. viii. 5.)

And the New Testament precept is equally comprehensive and equally minute, "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matt. xxviii. 20.) And in religion who shall dare to add anything which Christ has not commanded?

And for insisting on what God commands, and excluding everything else from the religion and churches

of Christ, reason is as imperative as Scripture. If children offend a parent by breaking his laws, no human being can know and tell what those children are to do to make amends and please that parent but himself; and how much more when men have offended their "Father in heaven," can no one tell them what to do, but God! And if the neighbor who comes in, in your absence, and adds to or alters your directions, is guilty of impertinence and folly toward yourself, as well as a fatal and terrible wrong to your children, what name shall be given to his conduct who comes in between God and us, his erring creatures, "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men"?

In the Christian reformatory movement of the sixteenth century, sublime as it was, if we may trust D'Aubigné, there was one dire mistake. Luther determined to leave standing in the churches whatever was not forbidden by the Scriptures; while others justly insisted on turning out of the churches everything which God had not put into them. The word of Luther still was, "Where is it forbidden?" that of some less prominent reformers, "Where is it commanded?" The word of Luther prevailed; and the present condition of Christian churches in Europe is the practical comment: the Sabbath desecrated, the churches strong, the gospel weak, and Christ himself, the living Saviour, pushed aside by forms and rites and governments, which men have instituted in his name; while "darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people."

"The Puritans," whose memory we this day hallow and keep green, were so called, not because they claimed to be purer than their neighbors, but because they were resolved to "purify" the churches, by reducing their doctrines, rites, and government to the simple standard of God's word. Their chief difficulty was with spurious church government and rites. We are told by their historian, Neal (vol. I. 108), that at first "there was no difference in doctrine between the Puritans and Conformists." But we, the descendants of those Puritans, have in this respect reversed their ideas. We have sometimes split the very hairs of doctrine. They, the Puritans, seeing the churches of Christ were originally corrupted in their government first, and next in their rites, and last of all in doctrine, — false doctrine being brought in to cover and defend those practical corruptions which made and named the "dark ages," which, indeed, were nothing but ages of priest-rites and despotism; seeing this, I say, the controversies of the Puritans turned less on doctrines than on spurious and man-contrived rites; and they insisted that men might not manufacture church governments for God!

In 1549, the learned and pious Hooper refused to be consecrated in Episcopal robes; and as this was the entering wedge of separation, the Puritans were sneered at as "embroiling the Christian world for a garment." It was not, however, the *garment*, but what that garment covered, which distressed them. "*Si tu diaboli pompam oderis*," they quoted to Arch-

bishop Parker from Tertullian, "*quicquid ex ea attigeris id scias esse idolatriam.*"[1] They believed that the robes of idolatry were idolatrous; and to wear them was to practise idolatry. They objected to diocesan bishops. They condemned lordly and unchristian titles. They hated church despotism. They denied the Apocrypha. They disliked Christmas, and the festivals to which the other "masses" gave rise. They would not kneel at communion, because it was worshipping the host. They would not make the sign of the cross, because it was a piece of conjuring to keep off the devil; nor bow the knee when the name o Jesus occurred in the service, because it was founded on a false interpretation.

But the principle underlying all their objections was simply this: They wanted God's religion, and not man's; Abel's religion, and not Cain's; Judah's and not Jeroboam's; the religion which God gives in the mount, and not that which Aaron manufactures at its base; a religion of God's appointment, and not of man's devices.

And the question for us this day, is, WERE THOSE PURITANS RIGHT IN THEIR CARDINAL PRINCIPLE, OR NOT?

The world has not forgotten that they hung witches, nor is likely to, while a cold, Christless, scriptureless rationalism lives to remind us of it; nor that they kept up, for a time, the bad fashion, which they learned in England, of inflicting civil penalties for religious error.

[1] If you hate the pomp of the devil, then know that whatever of that you come in contact with, is idolatry.

But the question is, was their separation from the rites and government of their State church based on a folly or a fact? Is it true that God has given us a religion, or may men make one? or, if not make one outright, may they patch and splinter at will the religion which is given us of God?

It is now three solid centuries since Bradshaw published his "English Puritanism." Since that time the three systems then designated by their leading ideas; "PURITANISM," "PRESBYTERY," and "PRELACY," have in this country, Scotland, and England, walked down, side by side, through three centuries. I trust that the mere glance at them we can now take will enable every honest mind to try these three systems by the Saviour's test, — their fruits.

But, before discussing the systems, let us carefully distinguish them from the "faith of Christ," which they all hold and have ever held in common. The English or Episcopal church has had her martyrs, who abhorred auricular confession, the mass, enforced celibacy, and generally the inventions and sorceries of Rome. And no enlightened Puritan wishes to ignore the glorious record which Presbyterians have given to the world, particularly in their bloodless redemption of Scotland from Popery; and later, when eighteen thousand Presbyterians, in twenty-five years, suffered persecution; many, even unto death; many more to banishment; and more still, in the prisons of Dunnottar Castle and the Bass, during the bloody and terrible struggle of the Stuarts to force Prelacy upon Scotland.

The Protestant who does not feel his heart thrill, and his eye moisten at the tunes of "Dundee," and "Martyrs," — who does not cherish with a holy pride the memories of those Presbyterians who stood calmly on soil wet with their own blood, for "Christ's crown and covenant" against the inventions of Prelacy and the Pope, — is either a bad Protestant or a blind one.

Nor do we wish to ignore or forget the precious truth which other Christian denominations have held and taught, and still hold and teach, in our own country, and at the present day. Wherever there is a living faith in Christ, there is a Christian brother; and as such, we hail and love him, though for his "wood, hay, and stubble," he may exclude us from his communion, or shut us from his desk. Nay, even the poor Papist may possibly find Christ amid his sacraments; ay, and trust him too in spite of his forms. The meek Papist, Fenelon, may teach Protestants the gentler Christian graces, and the lion-hearted Luther find Christ while practising penance upon a stone stairway at Rome.

But let us distinguish the things which differ. Two spirits, of very opposite natures, seem to have striven at the same time within the body of the youth in the gospel, whose father brought him to Christ, the one healing, the other rending him. (Mark ix. 26.) And surely if the Spirit of God and of Satan can be working in the same person at the same moment, there is, at least, no inherent absurdity in supposing that in the religious systems now existing and com-

peting for our acceptance, there may be elements at work as opposite in their nature as light is to darkness, or as Satan is to Christ. If, therefore, in this discussion, I attribute some things in organizations called churches to the "Prince of this world" (John xii. 31), let me not be accused of unchurching churches, or unchristianizing men.

Further, it was among the earliest national utterances of Abraham Lincoln, that "*No country can permanently endure part slave, and part free;*" and its truth has since been verified, at least in this country, by the providence of God.

And the truth is equally obvious that no country can enjoy the highest degree of prosperity, even if it can permanently endure conflicting church governments. Our Congregational churches must prevail, or perish ultimately; indeed, I think I may say, no one expects the sects of Christendom always to continue related to each other as they are. The newspapers report the new Romish Archbishop, Manning, of England, as saying in a recent speech, just after his return from Rome: — "Two things are simply apparent; one, that Protestantism, having, like other errors, run its course of three hundred years, is everywhere giving way; and the other, that the Roman Catholic church is strengthening and expanding on every side," and the learned prelate goes on to say, that the "Anglican church will soon be what the Arians and Donatists are now, — a page in history." I wish there were no facts to encourage such prophets and to justify such prophecy.

And while such is the boast of the Romish archprelate, other sects and sect-leaders are earnest, active, and arrogant as he, just in proportion as their sects resemble his in the worldliness of its spirit and the centralization of its power. And their vaunting is not without reason. For "the world," which ever "loves its own," will evermore support the worldly system, and forsake the divine. And when human devices are mixed up with God's appointments in a church, the human part always counteracts the influence of the divine.

The whole subject of church government may thus be considered as fairly up for discussion, and there is no rock on which the mind can rest, but the Word of God.

What then remains to us? Shall we, too, turn sectarians, and raise our clamor with the rest? God forbid. Let us ever, as we do now, love our brethren of other denominations. Let us recognize their baptisms and ordinations, welcome their coöperation, honor their Christian virtues, learn if we may from their teachings, and respect their prejudices, even; but let us see to it that we, as churches, "abide in Christ and have his words abiding in us."

What, then, are the "words" of Christ touching the order or discipline of a church? Simply that we, in love, go to our offending brother alone, and "tell him his fault." If he refuse to hear us, "take one or two more," and repeat the effort; and "if he neglect to hear them, tell it to the church" to which

the brother offending belongs. But if he "hear not the church," that is final. "Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican;" that is, treat him coolly and courteously as you would a Chinaman, or a Caffir: be kind to him, pity, pray for him, and let him alone. That is all the church-government that Jesus Christ has given. And this is not government in any coercive or secular sense; for withdrawing fellowship is not governing. If you take his case to a bishop, or a circuit-preacher, or a Presbytery, then you attempt to govern him; for that is government, whether exercised by one man or a few. But for a handful of men and women in a local church, to cease to love, and withdraw from, a member, who by his vices has ceased to be lovely, is not government, but liberty, and "the perfect law of liberty."

Let us now go back three hundred years, and see where the Puritans stood. Their whole belief and practice touching the church is given by Mr. Bradshaw in his "English Puritanism," already cited. He says:

1st. "The Puritans hold and maintain the absolute perfection of the Holy Scriptures, both as to faith and worship; and that whatsoever is enjoined as any part of divine service that cannot be warranted by the said Scriptures is unlawful.

2d. "That all inventions of men, especially such as have been abused to idolatry, are to be excluded out of the exercises of religion."—(Neal i. 248.)

This is *Puritanism*, and the whole of it. It is sim-

ply "abiding in Christ," and Christ's "words abiding in us." The members of the first church known in London to be organized upon this principle were arrested, and sixty-four men and women locked in the prisons of Newgate and Giltspur-Compten. Even in the days of the Puritan Cromwell, there were but six "Independents" or "Congregationalists" in that august body of one hundred and fifty-one members, the Westminster Assembly. But the principle thus announced by Bradshaw now numbers its churches by thousands, and its triumphs by the rights of man it has secured; for the influence of the Puritan or Congregational principle, outside of the denomination, is far wider and mightier than within. It has infused itself into and modified all other denominations, by showing a ready remedy for their oppressions and furnishing a ready refuge for their oppressed. Popery, prelacy, indeed no centralized human church-organization, dares now oppress its members, lest they should cast off its jurisdiction and set up for themselves. Nay, the very civil governments of Christendom have already drawn light from the sun of a New Testament church. Hume, Brougham, and Macaulay explicitly declare that the Puritans put into the British Constitution all the liberty it contains; and, as to this country, it is written by the French DeTocqueville, nay, it is simply notorious, that the "Town-meeting" was modelled from the meeting of a Congregational Church; that a county was but a collection of

towns, — a State, of counties, and our Federal Government, of States; so that, as a single unit is the element and key of all arithmetic, one free, Christian man is the germ and principle and type of this mighty republic; and the Mayflower is the mother of nations!

So, then, Jefferson Davis was not mistaken when he proposed, in his speech to the Legislature of Mississippi, to reconstruct the country with "New England left out!" or, as a clerical writer, in the papers at Chicago and Milwaukee, in the interest of Episcopacy and the rebellion, expounded it, "with the Puritan element left out."

The rebel chiefs were notoriously tired of popular government, and wished for slavery and an empire. They thought they could carry the country for both, if they were once rid of New England; and they were not mistaken. For brave as were our Western troops, and mighty as were their victories, they were led by men, in most instances, who paid fealty to the slave-power which waged the war, long after the representatives of New England were demanding the equal law of God and the inalienable rights of man.

It is significant that in all the Slave States there was scarcely one Congregational Church; but now, in those very States, there probably will soon be hundreds. The reason is, that Christ's churches could not live in slavery, any more than fishes can live in a dead sea. And the impossibility that a church

should live under a system which repealed all the rights of God and man, proves it a church of Christ, as the impossibility for Christ to live in this world without being crucified, proves him the Son of God.

There were, indeed, throughout the Southern States, many churches governed by majority votes, but no, or next to no, Puritan churches, governed by the Word of God. Nor has the Congregational or Puritan principle achieved its triumphs by a sectarian sacrifice of charity. The freest minds on earth from all sectarian bias are precisely those now grouped in Congregational Churches; and this the Congregational Churches of New England have proved, and more than proved, by establishing, through their men and money, in the sections of this vast country outside of New England, more churches of other denominations than they have of their own! — a fact which has no parallel in the history of the religions of men.

Let us now, not in the spirit of sect, but in that charity which "rejoiceth in the truth," glance at the two systems which compete with that of the Puritans, namely: Presbytery and Prelacy.

And, as many are ignorant of the practical working of Presbyterianism, I would point out its unscriptural features. If a brother in one of the Presbyterian Churches connected with a General Assembly is charged with an offence, he is first tried by "the Session," consisting of his minister and elders. If cleared there, he can be taken by the

prosecutor to a movable court, called a "Presbytery," which is made up of ministers and elders, chosen, *not by the churches*, but by the sessions. If cleared by the Presbytery, he can be taken by appeal to another and commonly more distant, movable court, called a Synod, which is made up from the Presbyteries. If acquitted there, he can still be taken to the General Assembly, which may meet that year in Charleston or in New Orleans.

No sane man, who should have been robbed of his horse, would seek to regain it by prosecuting in such a system of courts: so unequal, for he is not tried by his peers; so expensive, for he is at his own costs for himself and witnesses. And yet every Presbyterian brother connected with either Assembly is content to leave his own and the religious standing of his wife and children where he would consider his horse lost! Then, the idea of a supreme court, called a "General Assembly," made up of four or five hundred ministers and elders, meeting once a year, and sitting two or three weeks, to exercise an appellate supervision over all the cases of discipline which may reach it by appeal from all its churches between Boston and San Francisco, is simply an absurdity. The very best that can be hoped of such a system, is, that the worldly nature in itself, and worldly wisdom in its ministers, will prevent the exercise, in this free country and amid free churches, of the horrible powers it contains.

But the Christian objection to this system is, that it is simply an extra-scriptural human invention, wholly without warrant in the word of God. Every child knows by the very names of "Session," "Presbytery," "Synod," and "Assembly," that such a four-story system of appellate "courts" is not found in the Bible. Few or none of the Presbyterians, even, pretend to find them there. In 1837, I heard the Rev. Dr. Robert J. Breckenridge on the floor of the General Assembly, say, in answer to a question, "No one pretends to any scriptural warrant for this General Assembly." These were his words.

If, then, this system is not scriptural, what is it? I answer, it is an invention by good men to govern the churches of Christ. It is a government for God's children, made without leave of their Father, or warrant of his word! It is a code of rules for "the bride, the Lamb's wife," which the Bridegroom has not authorized. It is a system of so-called "courts of Christ," which Christ, our law-giver, has never sanctioned; and although, like Lynch-courts in our mining cities, they may do good while in the hands of good men, they are as truly without authority from the Bible, which is the Christian's statute-book, as a Lynch committee is without authority from the statute of the State!

Such is Presbyterianism as it now exists; and its history is not better than its theory. In Scotland, the land of its martyrs and its glorious testimonies for Christ, as a system of discipline, it ran down

rapidly, until, in 1843, five hundred of its best ministers left it, and came out, with Dr. Chalmers at their head, I regret to add, to repeat, in the government of their mis-called "Free Church," their original mistake; while, in this country, as Mr. Greeley has shown in his history of our "great conflict," those General Assemblies have stood sentinels of the slave power, condemning it in words but protecting it in practice, as long as it was possible for them to do so.

But let it be remembered that these "courts" are no part of the churches of Christ, but artificial, worldly systems, placed over them. As governments, they have been ceaselessly fluctuating; and each of the two leading Assemblies now claims to be the true one, and that the other is spurious. The truth is, both are spurious.

But I shall be told that their doctrine is sound, and that the Holy Spirit attends and seals the preaching of their ministers:—all this I rejoice to acknowledge, and acknowledge to rejoice. They are my brethren; but their church-courts are founded in error. Am I, therefore, their enemy because I tell them the truth?

I should be comparatively happy, if Episcopacy, into which our children, and sometimes our ministers even, are sliding, had anything like so fair a record as the Presbyterian system.

Here, again, let me warn my hearers to separate the faith of Christ, which we all hold in common, from the systems which I condemn.

Episcopacy has long been the State religion of an Empire, which, till the United States arose, was the first government on earth, — the freest, the greatest!

If, therefore, Episcopacy has made for itself an indifferent record, it has not been for lack of a field, and all the elements of worldly influence, power, intelligence, and wealth. It, too, has had its martyrs for the truth of Christ. Seldom, perhaps never, in the history of persecution, has more piety and learning perished together, than was burned in 1555, in front of the old Baliol College, where Latimer and Ridley perished at the same stake, — or in a single person, than was burned in Cranmer the following year. And these men, be it remembered, were burned upon a question of church government and rites: the papal supremacy and the real presence. Let no Christian fail to glorify Christ in these men; nor yet in the Leightons, the Legh Richmonds, and the Tyngs of later times.

But what we have to consider, is, the "Episcopal Church," ordained by Queen Elizabeth, "by act of Parliament," continued substantially the same by her successors until now, and copied, as near as may be, in the "Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States."

Their faith in Christ they had as we have it, from God. But Elizabeth told her bishop, when reconstructing the ruins left by bloody Mary, to make the liturgy as Evangelical as he could, and yet "keep the popish people in the church."

This single sentence of the Queen's shows the animus of that organization, as an organization, ever since. It was worldly in its origin, and has been so in its continuance. It was, from the first, a Jeroboam's religion, based upon political considerations. It was born of a Queen, and has affected empire ever since. It is to-day in the Sandwich Islands seizing their well-earned laurels from the missionaries of the American Board, and spurning from their pulpits the very men who have christianized the Islands to their hands? Let no one say that we insult it by comparing it with the calf-worship of Bethel and of Dan. Like Jeroboam's religion, it derived its prestige from the magnificence of a court.

But this may be called theorizing. Let us come to facts. Episcopacy had stood as the state religion, sustained by the power and treasure of England, from Elizabeth to Victoria, — a period of two hundred and seventy years, when an attempt was made, in 1843, to rally the clergy of Great Britain against the errors of the Oxford Tracts, — errors of which Bishop McIlvaine said: "*they do not put us on the road to Rome; they have taken us there.*" The effort was general and earnest. All of the clergy called Evangelical signed the petitions against the candles, saint-worship, purgatory, real presence, and ritual salvation of Dr. Pusey and the Tractarians; when of (16,000) sixteen thousand clergymen of the Establishment, only four thousand could be rallied against Romanizing their church! And it cannot be denied, that much of the

gospel-life in the English Establishment has been forced into it from without by the workings of dissent. For when men like Cobden and Bright were pressing the Tory interest, a patron-lord wrote his diocesan, "For God's sake, bishop, if you have a pious young man in orders, send him to us, or our people will all go over to the Chapel, and we shall be left in a minority in our elections." Thus pious stock has risen in "the Church."

Nor has the American daughter of the English State-church a fairer record to show. Like Christ's disciples on the night of his betrayal, overborne by our great national curse and disaster, other churches have been derelict, but the Episcopal Church stood by and "confirmed" Jefferson Davis and Braxton Bragg when first the rebellion began to falter. And if the head of Jefferson Davis shall fall, it will be because the consecrating hands of an Episcopal bishop, laid on him when his crimes were in their zenith, could not shield that head from justice. Nay, even since the rebellion has fallen, their triennial convention of bishops, clergy, and distinguished laymen, have refused leave to their people to give thanks to God for the overthrow of treason and the emancipation of slavery! though their slavery was the stone on the cave's mouth where Christ and human freedom lay buried!

"These," it may be said, "are the frailties and errors of men." They are the errors of a system — a dire and fatal system — which pushes aside Christ,

in his own temple, and sets up rites and priestism in his place!

Spurious religious rites to-day govern the unchristian and a large part of the Christian world. And though we, the descendants of the Puritans, have their solemn declaration, sealed with their blood, that all rites invented by men, and not given by Christ, are "unlawful;" though we see in much of our foreign emigration the sure and certain effects of such rites on character; though we know from the Scriptures that God "hath not respect" to the self-projected worship of Cain; though we know, with Charlotte Elizabeth, from Moses and from Paul, that "whatsoever worship is not paid to God is received by Satan;" that "the things which Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils," not to God; yet hosts of false rites and dark "orders" rising like mists and exhalations all around us, darkening our moral heavens, confounding men's notions of religion, decoying the simple, bribing the covetous with promises of money, luring the ambitious with hopes of preferment, and dazzling the fantastic with mystery and show, hang along our horizon like clouds, heavy and portentous of wrath!

Which way soever we turn, we are met and challenged by rites which the Puritans abhorred. We cannot take up a "Christian Almanac," though published by avowed Puritans, but we meet on the cover a calendar of such days and rites as men have invented and added to the appointed worship of God.

Take at random a few of these names which our children read from our almanac covers, and see how barbarous they sound from a Christian pulpit: "Purification of the Blessed Virgin;" "Ember days;" "Rogation Sunday;" "Lent;" "Saints Simon and Jude;" "Saint Michael and all Angels;" "All Saints day;" "Holy innocents;" with more individual and particular saints' days than patience can recite, or rational memory retain;—and then say, is it strange that heads replete with such materials should have occasion for the words of Watts:—

> "How they divide our wavering minds,
> And leave but half for God."

But such things do not, will not, leave half the mind for God. They soon absorb the whole of it. For worship in the soul, like fealty in woman, is for one. And if history teaches anything, it teaches that when human devices are mixed with God's appointments, the inventions always take the lead, and characterize the organization in which they are so mixed. Take the following proofs:—

The ancient Sabians worshipped God and idols; but when they had consecrated a field to both, they were continually taking the fruits from God's part, and adding to that of their idols. Mohammed reformed upon Sabianism. He taught but one God, and acknowledged Christ as a prophet. But his followers dropped Christ, and to-day the creed of the Sultan makes no mention of his name. So the Mor-

mons, who are a reproduction of the Saracens, with another inspired book beside the Bible, and another prophet beside Christ, call themselves the "Church of Jesus Christ, or Latter Day Saints." But they obey false prophets, worship spirits, and deride the Scriptures. Nay, even the workers with familiar spirits among us put compliments to Christ in their books; "howbeit in works they deny him."

In all these instances, Satan is not Christ's fair antagonist, but his crafty rival. His method is not to deny religion, but to counterfeit it; not to confront Christians, but delude; not to resist revelation, but alloy it; not to reject, but adulterate; not to assault Christianity, but to mix; even as the spirit who infested the soothsaying damsel at Philippi, moved her to praise Paul and Silas, and mingle in their meetings, in order, if possible, to corrupt them and confound the minds of the people. Thus Satan hides among the very ordinances of religion; well knowing that in a mixed religion, part human and part divine, the frail and sinful hearts of men will evermore lean to the human and forsake the divine.

So was it in Christ's day. He told the Jews that their human worships were "vain." "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." (Matt. xv. 9.) And not only were their traditionary worships "vain," but as ever since, so then, their traditions made the "commandments of God of none effect." (Mark, vii. 13.)

Thus is it ever. Nothing is so purifying as true

worship; nothing so corrupting as false. All that Christ has appointed, — closet-prayer, social prayer, baptism, the Communion, and a Christian discipline, — every one is a telegraphic wire extending to and bringing influence from Christ; while every religious invention reaches and brings back a mesmerism from Satan.

Such is the voice of history. Such the voice of God. And shall Presbyterians and Episcopalians, — shall we ourselves prove an exception to this universal law, that to mix religion is to destroy it?

In our great National Council last June (1865), President Sturtevant, in the opening discourse, approved by the whole body, said: "Fathers and brethren, we must have done with this folly. We must make this ecclesiastical question one of principle."

But what principle is there for us but that laid down by the Puritans; namely, to follow Scripture and forsake tradition?

And we have occasion for devout thankfulness to God that our Congregational churches have been mercifully kept from forsaking the Puritan principle, which is admitting no other rule in church government and rites than the word of God. There is, however, I regret to say, one exception; which is, the omission by our churches of the name and ordination of Elders.

"They hold," says Bradshaw of the Puritans, "that by God's ordinance, the congregation should choose other officers as assistants to the ministers in the government of the church, who are, jointly with the

ministers, to be overseers of the manners and conversation of the whole congregation." (Neal I. 249.)

In the "Report on Church Polity," presented by Dr Bacon, and printed by our late National Council, the Scriptural doctrine of Eldership is expressly laid down.

His report says: "The number of elders or bishops in a particular church is neither prescribed nor limited, but it is to be determined by the discretion of the church itself. . . . In the American Congregatioual churches at the beginning, it was thought needful that each church should have at least three elders. The modern usage, concentrating all the powers of eldership in one person . . is exceptional, rather than normal." Then I submit that almost all our Congregational churches having each but a single elder and he a preaching elder, are on this point in an abnormal condition! So thought Rev. John Wise, of Ipswich, whose able work is republished entire, with commendation by our Congregational Board. He begs for restoration of the eldership.

The name of elders came into New England with the Puritans and was retained more than half a century. It then gave place to the name of "*Committee*," a word taken from a town-meeting. We still have the eldership in fact. No church ever did or ever will keep up discipline without having some persons selected to attend to it; and all who read the New Testament know that such persons are there called "elders;" and those New Testament el-

ders (excepting those who labor in word and doctrine) were precisely what we call a "standing committee," or a "committee of discipline." Precisely such were the Ephesian elders, whom Paul charged to "take heed to themselves and to all the flock.' (Acts xx. 28.) And all that our churches need, in order to conform outwardly to the word of God, which is the Puritan principle, is simply a vote to call our standing committee-men elders, and to set them apart to their most difficult work — far more difficult and responsible than preaching — by the prayers of the church.

And why, since the word of God, the Puritan principle, the report in our great Council, the necessities of our churches, and common sense itself require it, — why shall not that vote pass in every one of our churches?

If Presbyterians will consider it a concession to their system, be it so. Perhaps they will love us the better for it; but, concession or not, it is the word of God! Any one taking a concordance and looking at texts can easily see that there is about twenty times more authority in the New Testament for "elders" than for "deacons," which is a scriptural office. And since we have God's eldership, why should we not give it God's name for it? why should we separate what God hath joined, — the name from the thing, — and send a mere unordained committee-man to exercise discipline and "heal the hurts" of the God's people? Why should the children of New England attend,

and choose officers all their lives, without once hearing in their church-meetings that name of office most common in their Bibles? I rejoice that some Congregational churches have already restored the name and ordination of elders, and more are considering it.

"But why," one says, "if we have the thing, contend for the name elder?" By restoring the name and ordination of elders, you gain for your church an impregnable, because scriptural, position. You avoid confusion of ideas caused by putting on deacons the work of elders. And, above all, you make room for Christ and his "word" in our churches.

The grand evil in our churches is not *outward* but *inward*. We are in Jacob's condition before he saw the opening heavens and descending angels in his dream. God is in our churches, but multitudes "know it not."

Let us then arise and purify the temples of God; our own hearts first, and next his living temple, the church. Let us "purify our hearts by faith," and the churches by restoring what our Saviour hath placed there. Let us labor to drive out of every organization in this land and world, calling itself a "church of Christ," the inventions that men have pushed into them, in the name and interest of religion.

And oh! let us then *believe* Christ's very words, "*I will dwell in them, and walk in them!*" "and we," Father and Son! "*will come unto him and make our abode with him*" (John xiv. 23). Let us thus make room for Christ in his own house. For he comes

not in the atmosphere above our heads, but in our hearts — in his truth — in his ordinances. Let us be "*pure in heart*," and we shall "*see God.*" So we shall *become partakers of the divine nature*, (2 Peter i. 4), and can sing without waiting for death or heaven:

> "Oh, glorious hour! Oh, blest abode!
> I shall be near and like my God."

Even a profane poet reading the story of Eden could see that such was our normal and proper condition, when

> "God walked with man, joint tenant of the shade."

But oh, how much more glorious the true, living, Christian conception that, in the words of Solomon, "God will indeed dwell with man!"

> "Angels descend with songs to men;
> And God shall dwell on earth again."

AMEN.

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